



TV WHITE SPACES & NATIVE AMERICANS

Native Americans, Particularly In Rural Areas, Are Disproportionately Affected By A Lack Of High-Speed Internet:

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC)'s 2015 Broadband Progress Report Reveals That 63 Percent Of All Native Americans, And 85 Percent Of Those In Rural Areas, Lack Broadband Access. "Approximately 63 percent of Tribal land residents lack access to fixed broadband speeds of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload, as compared to only 17 percent of the U.S. population as a whole. The disparity is even higher for residents of Tribal lands in rural areas, with approximately 85 percent lacking access according to the 2015 Broadband Progress Report." ("About The Office: Native Nations," [Federal Communications Commission](#), Accessed 10/30/17)

- Similarly, 2014 Research Conducted By Native Public Media And New America Suggested That The "Broadband Penetration Rate Across The 566 Federally Recognized Tribes Is Less Than 10%." (Contessa Gayles, "We Native Americans Are 'Poster Children' For No Internet Access," [CNN](#), 8/11/14)

The National Congress Of American Indians Notes The Lack Of Broadband Among Tribal Communities On Its Website. "To ensure that tribes are prepared to lead the way in America's digital future, NCAI has continued to advocate for increased broadband deployment and access for tribal communities. Tribal communities still lag behind the rest of the United States in access to radio, wireless, and broadband services. This disparity underscores the critical opportunity to ensure the advancement of telecommunications access throughout Indian Country." ("Telecommunications & Technology," [National Congress Of American Indians](#), Accessed 10/30/17)

Native Americans Called "Poster Children" For A Lack Of Internet Access. "'We were not mentioned at all,' she recalled. 'Native Americans are the most invisible, most underserved, and, as a result, most vulnerable group. We are the poster children of non-access to what drives the economy and the world today.'" (Contessa Gayles, "We Native Americans Are 'Poster Children' For No Internet Access," [CNN](#), 8/11/14)

The Lack Of Internet And Cost Of Gas Money Forcing Students To Graduate College Later Than Planned. "This has never been easy, consuming time as well as gas money. Now, with local gas prices nearing \$4 a gallon, Tsosie can no longer afford frequent trips to reach the Internet. She worries about the effects on her grades. Last semester, she failed a class after missing too many assignments – the result of unreliable web access, she says. 'If I passed that class, I would have been on time for graduating,' Tsosie said. 'I would have had one semester left and now I have two.'" (Gerry Smith, "On Tribal Lands, Digital Divide Brings New Forms Of Isolation," [HuffPost](#), 4/20/12)

In A 2016 Interview, One Member Of Navajo Nation Recounts Real-Life Consequences Of Lack Of Emergency Services Infrastructure. "It's been two years since Sonia's husband's fatal heart attack. Almost anywhere else in the United States, emergency services could have helped her. But in an isolated corner of the 27,000 square miles that constitute the Navajo Nation, she, her daughter and one of her granddaughters had to manage without technology most of the rest of America takes for granted." (Sam Thielman, "How A Digital Divide Leaves Parts Of America Isolated," [The Guardian](#), 5/16/16)



The Lack Of Broadband On Native American Reservations Often Extends To Libraries, Forcing Students To Drive To The Closest Cities To Get Connectivity. “‘Students will drive to neighboring cities and sit in the McDonald’s (MCD) parking lot to get connectivity,’ said Traci Morris of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma. She co-authored the study and is the director of the American Indian Policy Institute at Arizona State University. In a new report, Morris notes that the lack of broadband access even includes key community institutions on reservations, such as libraries.” (Contessa Gayles, “We Native Americans Are ‘Poster Children’ For No Internet Access,” [CNN](#), 8/11/14)

Low Population Density, Rough Terrain And Poverty Are Often Cited For The Lack Of Broadband On Reservations:

The Low Population Density Of Native American Reservations Has Led Providers To Focus On Bringing High-Speed Internet To Rural Areas Where They Can Get A Bigger Return On Investment. “Another impediment is low population density. In a 2015 testimony before the House of Representatives, Stephen Roe Lewis, the governor of the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona, noted a rate of 20 people per square mile (‘other tribal nations are even lower,’ he followed). Rantanen estimates the cost of laying fiber ranges from \$10,000 to \$50,000 per mile, depending on such factors as easements and topography. With such a limited potential subscriber base, major ISPs see no possibility for a return on investment.” (Julianne Tveten, “On American Indian Reservations, Challenges Perpetuate The Digital Divide,” [Ars Technica](#), 1/31/16)

- **For Example, In 2014, The U.S. Government Gave A \$32 Million Grant To The Navajo Nation’s State-Owned Internet Provider To Bring High-Speed Internet To 300,000 Navajos But Gave AT&T Tennessee \$156 Million To Bring Broadband To 80,000 Rural Tennesseans In 2015.** “A 2014 grant to Navajo’s state-owned internet provider, which aspires to serve the community of 300,000 across an area larger than West Virginia, totaled some \$32m. AT&T of Tennessee received \$156m in federal money to provide broadband access to 81,000 homes in rural Tennessee the following year.” (Sam Thielman, “How A Digital Divide Leaves Parts Of America Isolated,” [The Guardian](#), 5/16/16)

The Location Of Many Tribal Reservations Has Also Contributed To Their Lack Of Broadband. “One popular explanation is terrain. American Indian reservations are often located in remote, mountainous regions with extreme variations in elevation. Historically, carriers have dismissed the prospect of installing cables in these areas – particularly underground – fearing the process of digging and laying fiber would be arduous, time-consuming, and expensive.” (Julianne Tveten, “On American Indian Reservations, Challenges Perpetuate The Digital Divide,” [Ars Technica](#), 1/31/16)

Additionally, Native Americans Are More Likely To Be Impoverished Than The Average U.S. Citizen, Impacting Their Ability To Pay For Internet Access. “To make matters worse, those who are interested in paying for Internet access might not have the wherewithal to do so. In 2012, approximately 26 percent of American Indians were living in poverty. According to the 2010 census, the median income for American Indian and Alaska Native households was \$35,062 compared to the national median income of \$50,046. That \$35,062 figure only accounts for the incomes of American Indians and Alaska Natives not living on tribal lands; were it to solely reflect the incomes in Indian country, it would likely be notably lower. In 2015, the Gila River reservation’s figure was \$24,771 for example, and 48 percent of residents there lived below the poverty line. Under



conditions like these, monthly Internet fees of up to \$70 are a burden at best.” (Julianne Tveten, “On American Indian Reservations, Challenges Perpetuate The Digital Divide,” [Ars Technica](#), 1/31/16)

Both Congress And The FCC Have Taken Steps To Improve Broadband For Native Americans:

FCC Ajit Chairman Pai: “And Without Question, Rural Americans, Including Many In Indian Country, Disproportionately Find Themselves On The Wrong Side Of The Digital Divide.” (John Eggerton, “FCC’s Pai: More Must Be Done To Close The Tribal Digital Divide,” [Broadcasting & Cable](#), 6/15/17)

In August, FCC Chairman Pai Held A Meeting With Native Americans On How To Speed Up Broadband Deployment To Tribal Lands. “The FCC’s Office of Native Affairs and Policy and Wireless Telecommunications Bureau are hosting a Tribal Consultation with FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and staff from the Chairman’s office along with senior FCC staff from ONAP and WTB on issues addressed in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Notice of Inquiry entitled Accelerating Wireless Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment, WT Docket No. 17-79.” (“Tribal Consultation With FCC Chairman Ajit Pai,” [Federal Communications Commission](#), 8/22/17)

The FCC Created The Office Of Native Affairs And Policy (ONAP) In 2010 To Improve Broadband Infrastructure On Tribal Reservations. “The FCC’s Office of Native Affairs and Policy (ONAP) serves as Commission’s catalyst to help improve the level of broadband, telecommunications, and broadcast deployment throughout Indian country.” (“About The Office: Native Nations,” [Federal Communications Commission](#), 10/6/17)

In March, Senator John Hoeven, Current Chair Of The Senate Committee On Indian Affairs, Led A Roundtable On Infrastructure Needs Such As Broadband In Indian Country. ““Roads promote economic development and help tribes provide good governmental services. In addition, modernizing the way tribes access financing to build schools, healthcare facilities, and mitigate flooding impacts on tribal lands are essential for healthy and vibrant tribal communities.” (United States Senate Committee On Indian Affairs, “Hoeven: Infrastructure Important To Indian Country,” [Press Release](#), 3/15/17)

Earlier This Year, Senator Tom Udall Gave A Speech To The National Congress Of American Indians And Reiterated Their Importance For Tribal Communities. ““We must address these very basic needs. Everyone should have access to electricity and running water. And broadband is essential to economic development, education, and health care.”” (Senator Tom Udall, “Udall Address National Congress Of American Indians,” [Press Release](#), 2/13/17)

Senator John Barrasso, As Former Chair Of The Senate Committee On Indian Affairs, Led An April 2016 Hearing On Broadband On Native American Reservations. ““Quick and effective internet access is vital for many purposes such as commerce, public safety, education, and health. ‘This committee has received concerns from people living in rural Indian lands including in my home state of Wyoming, regarding unreliable internet service and significant barriers to improving access to even basic internet services in their communities.’” (United States Senate Committee On Indian Affairs, “Barrasso Opening Statement At Oversight Hearing On Telecommunications In Indian Country,” [Press Release](#), 4/27/16)



Senator John McCain Urged The National Telecommunications And Information Administration To Expand Broadband Access In Arizona, Particularly On Native American Reservations. “U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) sent a letter to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) today urging the agency to work with BroadbandUSA to hold an upcoming regional workshop in Arizona as a way to help communities expand broadband access and adoption – particularly across Native American reservations and rural parts of the state.” (Senator John McCain, “Senator John McCain Urges NTIA To Expand Broadband Access To Native American Reservations & Rural Arizona,” [Press Release](#), 4/26/16)

In February 2016, Representative Anna Eshoo Released The Findings Of A Report On How To Improve High-Speed Internet Access In Tribal Communities. “‘Bringing broadband access to hard-to-reach areas is often costly and difficult to deploy, but it is no less important,’ Eshoo said. ‘Native Americans are among the most economically distressed groups in America with many living in poverty. The opportunity a broadband connection brings to individuals – whether it is access to health care, education or commerce – holds even more potential for vulnerable and underserved populations. As the GAO report concludes, we can be doing more, and we should be doing more.’” (Congressman Anna Eshoo, “Eshoo Releases Findings Of Tribal Land Broadband Access Report,” [Press Release](#), 2/3/16)

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